

Lingala

Lingala (Ngala) is a [Bantu language](#) spoken throughout the northwestern part of the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) and a large part of the [Republic of the Congo](#). It is spoken to a lesser degree in [Angola](#) and the [Central African Republic](#). There are over 70 million lingalophones.

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History

In the 19th century, before the creation of the [Congo Free State](#), the *Bangala* (literally: 'river people') were a group of similar Bantu peoples living and trading along the bend of the Congo River that reached from [Irebu](#) at the mouth of the [Ubangi River](#)

Lingala	
Ngala	
<i>lingála</i>	
Native to	Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic,
Region	Congo River
Native speakers	Native speakers: Estimates range from 10 to 15 million speakers (2017) L2 speakers: 25 million speakers (2017) (2017) ^{[1][2]}
Language family	Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Atlantic–Congo ▪ Benue–Congo ▪ Southern Bantoid ▪ Bantu (Zone C) ▪ Bangi–Ntomba (C.30) ▪ Bangi–Moi ▪ Bangi ▪ Lingala
Dialects	Bangala
Writing system	African reference alphabet (Latin), Mandombe
Official status	
Official language in	 Democratic Republic of the

to the Mongala River.^[5] They spoke similar languages, such as Losengo, but their trade language was Bangi, which was the most prestigious language between Stanley Pool (Kinshasa) and Irebu. As a result, people upstream of the Bangala mistook Bangi for the language of the Bangala and called it Lingala (language of the Bangala), and European missionaries followed suit.

In the last two decades of the 19th century, after the forces of Leopold II of Belgium conquered the region and started exploiting it commercially, Bangi came into wider use. The colonial administration, in need of a common language for the region, started to use the language for administrative purposes. It had already simplified, compared to local Bantu languages, in its sentence structure, word structure and sounds, and speakers borrowed words and constructs liberally from other languages. This allowed the language to spread easily amongst the Congolese population. However, the fact that speakers had very similar native languages prevented Lingala from becoming as radically restructured as Kituba, which developed among speakers of both Bantu and West African languages.

Around 1900, CICM missionaries started a project to "purify" the language in order to make it "pure Bantu" again. Meeuwis (1998:7) writes:

[M]issionaries, such as the Protestant W. Stapleton and later, and more influentially, E. De Boeck himself, judged that the grammar and lexicon of this language were too poor for it to function properly as a medium of education, evangelization, and other types of vertical communication with the Africans in the northwestern and central-western parts of the colony ... They set out to 'correct' and 'expand' the language by drawing on lexical and grammatical elements from surrounding vernacular languages.

The importance of Lingala as a vernacular has since grown with the size and importance of its main centers of use, Kinshasa and Brazzaville; with its use as the lingua franca of the armed forces; and with the popularity of soukous music.

Name

European missionaries called the language Bangala, after the Bangala people, or Lingala. The latter was intended to mean '(language) of the Bangala' or 'of the River' (that is, 'Riverine Language'). However, this was an error, as the proper Bangi form would have been Kingala.^[6] The name Lingala first appears in writing in a publication by the CICM missionary Egide De Boeck (1903).

Characteristics and usage

 Congo  Republic of the Congo	
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ln (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ln)
ISO 639-2	lin (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=261)
ISO 639-3	lin
Glottolog	ling1263 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/ling1263) ^[3]
Guthrie code	c30B ^[4]
Linguasphere	99-AUI-f
  Geographic distribution of Lingala speakers, showing regions of native speakers (dark green) and other regions of use	

According to some linguists, Lingala is a Bantu-based creole of Central Africa^[7] with roots in the Bobangi language.^[8] In its basic vocabulary, Lingala has many borrowings from various other languages, such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English.

In practice, the extent of borrowing varies widely with speakers of different regions (commonly among young people), and during different occasions.

French

- *momí*, comes from 'ma mie' in old French meaning 'my dear' although it can sound like it means grandmother, is used in Lingala to mean girlfriend
- *kelási* for class/school

Spanish

- *chiclé* for chewing gum

Portuguese

- *manteka* for butter
- *mésa* for table
- *sapátu* for shoes

English

- *míliki* for milk
- *súpu* for soup
- *mamiwata* for mermaid, literally mammy/seareine
- *búku* for book^[9]
- *mótuka*, from *motor-car*, for car^[10]

Variations

The Lingala language can be divided into several dialects or variations. The major variations are considered to be Standard Lingala, Spoken Lingala, Kinshasa Lingala and Brazzaville Lingala.

Standard Lingala (called *lingala littéraire* or *lingala classique* in French) is mostly used in educational and news broadcasts on radio or television, in religious services in the Roman Catholic Church and is the language taught as a subject at all educational levels. Standard Lingala is historically associated with the work of the Catholic Church and missionaries. It has a seven-vowel system (/a/ /e/ /ɛ/ /i/ /o/ /ɔ/ /u/) with an obligatory tense-lax vowel harmony. It also has a full range of morphological noun prefixes with mandatory grammatical agreement system with subject–verb, or noun–modifier for each of class. Standard Lingala is largely used in formal functions.

Spoken Lingala (called *lingala parlé* in French) is the variation mostly used in the day-to-day lives of Lingalaphones. It has a full morphological noun prefix system, but the agreement system is more lax than the standard variation, i.e. noun-modifier agreement is reduced to two classes. Regarding phonology, there is also a seven-vowel system but the vowel harmony is not mandatory. This variation of Lingala is historically associated with the Protestant missionaries' work. Spoken Lingala is largely used in informal functions, and the majority of Lingala songs use spoken Lingala over other variations. Modern spoken Lingala is

increasingly influenced by French; French verbs, for example, may be "lingalized" adding Lingala inflection prefixes and suffixes: "acomprenaki te" or "acomprendersaki te" (he did not understand, using the French word comprendre) instead of classic Lingala "asimbaki ntína te" (literally: s/he grasped/held the root/cause not).

Phonology

Vowels

	Front	Back
Close	i	u
Close-mid	e	o
Open-mid	ɛ	ɔ
Open	a	

IPA	Example (IPA)	Example (written)	Meaning	Notes
i	/lilála/	lilála	orange	
u	/kulutu/	kulútu	elder	
e	/elongi/	elongi	face	
o	/mobáli/	mobáli	boy	pronounced slightly higher than the cardinal o, realized as [ø]
ɛ	/ɛlá/	ɛlá	today	
ɔ	/m'bóŋgo/	m'bóŋgo	money	
a	/áwa/	áwa	here	

Vowel harmony

Lingala words show vowel harmony to some extent. The close-mid vowels /e/ and /o/ normally do not mix with the open-mid vowels /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ in words. For example, the words *ndɔbɔ* 'fishhook' and *ndobo* 'mouse trap' are found, but not **ndɔbo* or **ndobɔ*.

Vowel shift

The Lingala spoken in Kinshasa shows a vowel shift from /ɔ/ to /o/, leading to the absence of the phoneme /ɔ/ in favor of /o/. The same occurs with /ɛ/ and /e/, leading to just /e/. So in Kinshasa, a native speaker will say *mbóte* as /m'bóte/, compared to the more traditional pronunciation of /m'bóteɛ/.

Consonants

	<u>Labial</u>		<u>Alveolar</u>			<u>Post-alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>
<u>Nasal</u>	<u>m</u>		<u>n</u>			<u>ŋ</u>		
<u>Stop</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>d</u>				<u>k</u> <u>g</u>
<u>Pre-nasalized</u>	^m p	^m b	ⁿ t	ⁿ d			ⁿ k	ⁿ g
<u>Fricative</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>v</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>z</u>	<u>ʃ</u> (ʒ)			
<u>Approximant</u>	<u>w</u>		<u>l</u>			<u>j</u>		

IPA	Example (IPA)	Example (written)	Meaning
<u>p</u>	/napési/	napésí	I give
^m <u>p</u>	/ ^m pε ^m béni/	mpεmbéni	near
<u>b</u>	/boliŋgo/	bolingo	love
^m <u>b</u>	/ ^m bεlí/	mbεlí	knife
<u>t</u>	/litéja/	litéya	lesson
ⁿ <u>t</u>	/ntóŋgó/	ntóngó	dawn
<u>d</u>	/daidai/	daidai	sticky
ⁿ <u>d</u>	/ ⁿ deko/	ndeko	sibling, cousin, relative
<u>k</u>	/mokɔlɔ/	mokɔlɔ	day
ⁿ <u>k</u>	/ ⁿ kóló/	nkóló	owner
<u>g</u>	/galaméle/	galaméle	grammar
ⁿ <u>g</u>	/ ⁿ gáí/	ngáí	me
<u>m</u>	/mamá/	mamá	mother
<u>n</u>	/bojini/	boyini	hate
<u>ŋ</u>	/ŋama/	nyama	animal
<u>f</u>	/fɔtɔ/	fɔtɔ	photograph
<u>v</u>	/veló/	veló	bicycle
<u>s</u>	/sɔlɔ/	sɔlɔ	truly
ⁿ <u>s</u>	/ŋɔnɔ/	nyɔnɔ	all
<u>z</u>	/zélɔ/	zélɔ	sand
ⁿ <u>z</u> (1)	/ ⁿ zá ^m be/	nzámbe	God
<u>ʃ</u>	/ʃakú/	cakú or shakú	African grey parrot
<u>l</u>	/́lɔ/	́lɔ	gold
<u>j</u>	/jé/	yé	him; her (object pronoun)
<u>w</u>	/wápi/	wápi	where

(1) [ⁿʒ] is allophonic with [ʒ] depending on the dialect.

Prenasalized consonants

The prenasalized stops formed with a nasal followed by a voiceless plosive are allophonic to the voiceless plosives alone in some variations of Lingala.

- /^mp/: [^mp] or [p]

e.g.: mpεmbéni is pronounced [^mpε ^mbéni] but in some variations [pε ^mbéni]

- /ⁿt/: [ⁿt] or [t]

e.g.: nténgó is pronounced ⁿté ⁿgó but in some variations [té ⁿgó]

- /ⁿk/: [ⁿk] or [k]

e.g.: nkanya (*fork*) is pronounced [ⁿkanya] but in some variations [kanya]

- /ⁿs/: [ⁿs] or [s] (inside a word)

e.g.: nycnsc is pronounced [nóⁿsc] but in some variations [nósc]

The prenasalized voiced occlusives, /^mb/, /ⁿd/, /ⁿg/, /ⁿz/ do not vary.

Tones

Lingala being a tonal language, tone is a distinguishing feature in minimal pairs, e.g.: *mutu* (human being) and *mutú* (head), or *kokoma* (to write) and *kokómá* (to arrive). There are two tones possible, the normal one is low and the second one is high. There is a third, less common tone – starting high, dipping low and then ending high – all within the same vowel sound, e.g.: *bôngó* (therefore).

Tonal morphology

Tense morphemes carry tones.

- *koma* (kom^L-a : write) inflected gives

- simple present ^L-a^L :

nakoma na^L-kom^L-a^L (I write)

- subjunctive ^H-a^L :

nákoma na^H-kom^L-a^L (I would write)

- present:

nakomí na^L-kom^L-i^H (I have been writing)

- *sepela* (se^L-pel-a : enjoy) inflected gives

- simple present ^L-a^L :

osepela o^L-se^L-pel^L-a^L (you-SG enjoy)

- subjunctive ^H-a^L :

ósepéla o^H-se^Lpel^H-a^H (you-SG would enjoy)

- present ^L-i^H:

osepelí o^L-se^Lpel^L-i^H (you-SG have been enjoying)

Grammar

Noun class system

Like all Bantu languages, Lingala has a noun class system in which nouns are classified according to the prefixes they bear and according to the prefixes they trigger in sentences. The table below shows the noun classes of Lingala, ordered according to the numbering system that is widely used in descriptions of Bantu languages.

Class	Noun prefix	Example	Translation
1	mo-	mopési	<i>servant</i>
2	ba-	bapési	<i>servants</i>
3	mo-	mokíla	<i>tail</i>
4	mi-	mikíla	<i>tails</i>
5	li-	liloba	<i>word</i>
6	ma-	maloba	<i>words</i>
7	e-	elokó	<i>thing</i>
8	bi-	bilokó	<i>things</i>
9	m-/n-	ntaba	<i>goat</i>
10	m-/n-	ntaba	<i>goats</i>
9a	Ø	sánzá	<i>moon</i>
10a	Ø	sánzá	<i>moons</i>
11	lo-	lolemo	<i>tongue</i>
14	bo-	bosoto	<i>dirt</i>
15	ko-	kosala	<i>to work (infinitive)</i>

Individual classes pair up with each other to form singular/plural pairs, sometimes called 'genders'. There are seven genders in total. The singular classes 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 take their plural forms from classes 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, respectively. Additionally, many household items found in class 9 take a class 2 prefix (*ba*) in the plural: *lulu* → *balutu* 'spoon', *mesa* → *bamesa* 'table', *sani* → *basani* 'plate'. Words in class 11 usually take a class 10 plural. Most words from class 14 (abstract nouns) do not have a plural counterpart.

Class 9 and 10 have a nasal prefix, which assimilates to the following consonant. Thus, the prefix shows up as 'n' on words that start with *t* or *d*, e.g. *ntaba* 'goat', but as 'm' on words that start with *b* or *p* (e.g. *mbisi* 'fish'). There is also a prefixless class 9a and 10a, exemplified by *sánzá* → *sánzá* 'moon(s) or month(s)'. Possible ambiguities are solved by the context.

Noun class prefixes do not show up only on the noun itself, but serve as markers throughout the whole sentence. In the sentences below, the class prefixes are underlined. (There is a special verbal form 'a' of the prefix for class 1 nouns.)

- molakisi molai yango abiki (CL1.teacher CL1.tall that CL1:recovered) *That tall teacher recovered*
- bato bakúmisa Nkómbó ya Yó (CL2.people CL2.praise name of You) *(Let) people praise Your name* (a sentence from the Lord's Prayer)

Only to a certain extent, noun class allocation is semantically governed. Classes 1/2, as in all Bantu languages, mainly contain words for human beings; similarly, classes 9/10 contain many words for animals. In other classes, semantical regularities are mostly absent or are obscured by many exceptions.

Verb inflections and morphology

Verbal extensions

There are four morphemes modifying verbs. They are added to some verb root in the following order:

1. Reversive (-ol-)

e.g.: kozinga *to wrap* and kozingola *to develop*

2. Causative (-is-)

e.g. : koyéba *to know* and koyébisa *to inform*

3. Applicative (-el-)

e.g. : kobíka *to heal (self)*, *to save (self)* and kobíkela *to heal (someone else)*, *to save (someone)*

4. Passive (-am-)

e.g. : koboma *to kill* and kobomama *to be killed*

5. Reciprocal or stationary (-an-, sometimes -en-)

e.g. : kokúta *to find* and kokútana *to meet*

Tense inflections

The first tone segment affects the subject part of the verb, the second tone segment attaches to the semantic morpheme attached to the root of the verb.

- present perfect (LH-í)
- simple present (LL-a)
- recurrent present (LL-aka)
- undefined recent past (LH-ákí)
- undefined distant past (LH-áká)
- future (L-ko-L-a)

- subjunctive (HL-a)

Writing system

Lingala is more a spoken language than a written language, and has several different writing systems, most of them ad hoc. Due to the low literacy of Lingala speakers in Lingala (in the Republic of the Congo literacy rate in Lingala as a first language is between 10% and 30%), its popular orthography is very flexible and varies from one Congo to the other. Some orthographies are heavily influenced by the French language orthography; including double S, ss, to transcribe [s] (in the Republic of the Congo); ou for [u] (in the Republic of the Congo); i with trema, aï, to transcribe [ái] or [aí]; e with acute accent, é, to transcribe [e]; e to transcribe [ɛ], o with acute accent, ó, to transcribe [ɔ] or sometimes [o] in opposition to o transcribing [o] or [ɔ]; i or y can both transcribe [j]. The allophones are also found as alternating forms in the popular orthography; *sango* is an alternative to *nsango* (information or news); *nyonso*, *nyoso*, *nionso*, *nioso* (every) are all transcriptions of *nyɔ̃nsɔ̃*.

In 1976, the *Société Zairoise des Linguistes* (Zairian Linguists Society) adopted a writing system for Lingala, using the open e (ɛ) and the open o (ɔ) to write the vowels [ɛ] and [ɔ], and sporadic usage of accents to mark tone, though the limitation of input methods prevents Lingala writers from easily using the ɛ and ɔ and the accents. For example, it is almost impossible to type Lingala according to that convention with a common English or French keyboard. The convention of 1976 reduced the alternative orthography of characters but did not enforce tone marking. The lack of consistent accentuation is lessened by the disambiguation due to context.

The popular orthographies seem to be a step ahead of any academic-based orthography. Many Lingala books, papers, even the translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and more recently, Internet forums, newsletters, and major websites, such as Google's Lingala, do not use the Lingala-specific characters ɛ and ɔ. Tone marking is found in most literary works.

Alphabet

The Lingala language has 35 letters and digraphs. The digraphs each have a specific order in the alphabet; for example, *mza* will be expected to be ordered before *mba*, because the digraph *mb* follows the letter *m*. The letters *r* and *h* are rare but present in borrowed words. The accents indicate the tones as follows:

- no accent for default tone, the low tone
- acute accent for the high tone
- circumflex for descending tone
- caron for ascending tone

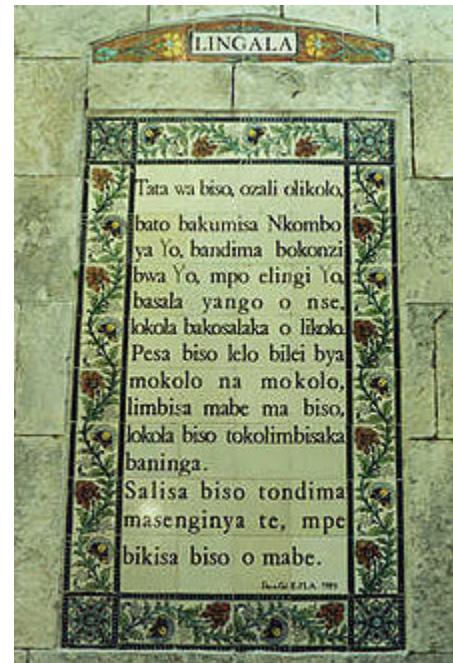
		Variants	Example
a	A	á â ă	nyama, matáta, sâmbóle, libwă
b	B		bísó
c	C		ciluba
d	D		madésu
e	E	é ê ě	komeka, mésa, kobênga
ɛ	ɛ	é ɛ ɛ	lɛlɛ, lékí, tɛ
f	F		lifúta
g	G		kogánga
gb	Gb		gbagba
h	H		bohlu (bohrium)
i	I	í î ì	wápi, zíko, tî, es̄
k	K		kokoma
l	L		kolála
m	M		kokóma
mb	Mb		kolámba, mbwá, mbɛlí
mp	Mp		límpa
n	N		líno
nd	Nd		ndeko
ng	Ng		ndéngé
nk	Nk		nkámá
ns	Ns		nsómi
nt	Nt		ntaba
ny	Ny		nyama
nz	Nz		nzala
o	o	ó ô ǒ	moto, sóngóló, sékô
ɔ	ɔ	ó ɔ ɔ	sɔsɔ, yó, sôlɔ, tɔ
p	P		pεnεpεnε
r	R		malaríya
s	S		kopésa
t	T		tatá
u	U	ú	butú, koúma
v	V		kovánda
w	W		káwa
y	Y		koyéba
z	Z		kozala

Sample

The Lord's Prayer (Catholic version)

Tatá wa bíso, ozala o likoló,
bato bakúmisa Nkómbó ya Yé,
bandima bokonzi bwa Yé, mpo elingo Yé,
basálá yangó o nsé,
lokóla bakosalaka o likoló
Pésa bíso IeIé biléi bya mokolo na mokolo,
límbisa mabé ma bíso,
lokóla bíso tokolimbisaka baníngá.
Sálisa bíso tondima masénginyá tê,
mpe bíkisa bíso o mabé.

Na yé bokonzi,
nguyá na nkembo,
o bileko o binso sékô.
Amen.



Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (Protestant version used in Ubangi-Mongala region)

Tatá na bíso na likoló,
nkómbó na yé ezala mosanto,
bokonzi na yé eya,
mokano na yé esalama na nsé
lokola na likoló.
Pésa bíso kwanga ekokí IeIé.
Límbisa bíso nyongo na bíso,
pelamoko elimbisi bíso bango nyongo na bango.
Kamba bíso katí na komekama tê,
kasi bíkisa bíso na mabé.

Mpo ete na yé ezalí bokonzi,
na nguyá, na nkembo,
lobiko na lobiko.
Amen.

Mandombe

The Mandombe script is an abugida, primarily used to write Kikongo, that can also be used for Lingala. The script is used in the church of Kimbangu as a liturgical script.

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External links

- [First words in Lingala](http://perso.wanadoo.fr/pascal.grouselle/) (<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/pascal.grouselle/>) (in French)
- [Maloba ya lingála](http://www.suka-epoque.de/SukaE-B-dictionnaire%20lingala.htm) (<http://www.suka-epoque.de/SukaE-B-dictionnaire%20lingala.htm>) (in French)
- [Dictionnaire bilingues lingala - français](https://web.archive.org/web/20130130125802/http://www.kasaflo.net/lingala/lingala.htm) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130130125802/http://www.kasaflo.net/lingala/lingala.htm>) (in French)
- [Dictionary of Congo-Brazzaville National Languages](http://www.bantu-languages.com/en/dico.html) (<http://www.bantu-languages.com/en/dico.html>)
- [Lingala-English dictionary](http://www.freelang.net/dictionary/lingala.php) (<http://www.freelang.net/dictionary/lingala.php>) [Freelang](http://www.freelang.net/dictionary/lingala.php)
- [Lingala Swadesh list of basic vocabulary words](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Lingala_Swadesh_list) (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Lingala_Swadesh_list) (from Wiktionary's [Swadesh-list appendix](#) (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Swadesh_lists))
- [PanAfriL10n page on Lingala](http://www.bisharat.net/wikidoc/pmwiki.php/PanAfrLoc/Lingala) (<http://www.bisharat.net/wikidoc/pmwiki.php/PanAfrLoc/Lingala>)
- [UCLA Language Profiles : Lingala](https://web.archive.org/web/20110605044949/http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=14&menu=004) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20110605044949/http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=14&menu=004>)
- [Google in Lingala](http://www.google.com/intl/ln/) (<http://www.google.com/intl/ln/>)
- [Inflections: Problems](http://www.indiana.edu/~hlw/Inflection/problems.html) (<http://www.indiana.edu/~hlw/Inflection/problems.html>)
- [Small Collection of Lingala Online resources](https://web.archive.org/web/20060212120136/http://dicts.info/1/lingala.php) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20060212120136/http://dicts.info/1/lingala.php>)
- [Parallel French-Lingala-English texts](http://www.carelinks.net/gospel/lingala.htm) (<http://www.carelinks.net/gospel/lingala.htm>)
- [Maneno \(African blogging platform\) in Lingala](https://web.archive.org/web/20090720125508/http://www.maneno.org/lin/home/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20090720125508/http://www.maneno.org/lin/home/>)

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